

WHY OF THE SEMINOLES THROUGH THE EUROPEAN WAR

How Everglades Indians, Peculiar Recluses, Most Keenly Feel the Shock

HELPED BY UNCLE SAM

Interesting Facts About These Florida Folk Who Dress in Strange Garb

It is probable that no group of people in the United States have been hit so hard by the European war as the Seminole Indians in their Everglades homes, where the foot of white man rarely treads and where one would think, they would be far from the influences which affect civilization. Their rights have been guaranteed that if the United States, through its commissioner, had not extended its helping hand, and found employment for them, it is probable the Indians would have suffered greatly.

The chief source of income possessed by the Seminoles, according to Lucian A. Spencer, special commissioner, United States Service, who has offices on the third floor of the Federal building, Miami, is furs, principally beaver. The high prices of furs are twelve to fifteen dollars each for these furs, prevailing in former years, enabled the Indians to live comfortably and even to purchase certain of the white man's luxuries.

By far the greater part of the hides and furs were shipped abroad, so that when the war began, with its blockade and submarine activities and other evils, the Indians dropped to two dollars and fifty cents during the first year of the war. Now they are bringing a little more, but still are far below normal prices. Best quality furs are now selling at about \$4 each, but troubles of the Seminoles have increased by the speculative fever which seized on a number of white men of the north who bought all the furs offered last year at \$2.50 and put them in cold storage to prevent the market this year opened strong, but when these speculators threw their holdings on it there was a quick slump, and "Lo, the Poor Indian," felt the full effect of Europe's war once more.

It was thought by friends of the Seminole that Milady's fall of wearing furs on her shoes, her hat, collar, and in fact about everywhere a bit could be placed, would have a tendency to relieve the situation, but coincident with the announcement of the unique fashion, came the unloading of cold storage furs on the market, so that the speculators got the benefit of Milady's whim, and the poor Indian sadly into a depleted treasury without having the means of relieving a situation caused by the sins of others.

Term "Florida Seminole" Is Partly a Misnomer.

The common belief that the Indians of the Florida Everglades, frequently seen on the streets of Miami, are Seminoles is partly wrong, as there are only one hundred and ninety-four seminoles in the state, the remainder of the six hundred being Miccosesees. The tribes are distinct from each other and speak different languages. There are not over six Indians in the state, it is said, who can converse in both tongues.

Miccosesees Came to Florida in 1513.

When the Creek confederation was formed in 1513, one tribe refused to

join, and, leaving the Creek country, came to Florida where they were known as Miccosesees and afterwards as Seminoles. It was the early Spanish settlements their language became so corrupt with the Spanish that it became a distinct dialect.

In 1750 the lower Creek tribes, now known as the Seminoles, seceded from the confederation and came to Florida. The Miccosesees and Seminoles maintained friendly relations and were united in their opposition to an army of defense, but, at the same time, their tribal government, camps and families were kept separate. While there have been a few intermarriages between the two tribes, yet they are the exception rather than the rule.

When Spain ceded Florida to the United States, in 1821, J. A. Penrose was once appointed agent to the Florida Indians. In the latter part of 1823 a treaty was negotiated and signed by which the Florida Indians agreed to relinquish all claim to Florida lands, except a reservation in the present county of Jackson and a smaller one in what is now Gadsden county. By the terms of the treaty the Indians were not to leave the reservation and the government agreed to keep all white people from trespassing on Indian lands.

Greer of the White Man Crowded Indians Out. The Indians zealously kept their part of the agreement but white settlers were allowed on one tract and another, to enter the Indian country until, in 1826, all the fertile lands had been taken from the Indians. A quote from the report of Colonel Humphreys, their agent: "The lands were legally theirs and they were starving." President Adams considered the matter so important that he addressed a message to congress asking legislation that would right this injustice.

On May 9th, 1832, a new treaty was signed by James Livingston and Okeechobee river, which gave the Seminoles a like amount of land in Arkansas, providing they would relinquish all claims in Florida. The Indians signed the treaty with the distinct understanding that seven of their chiefs would be taken to the new tract and if it should be found satisfactory they would move, otherwise the treaty would be void. The seven chiefs were taken to Arkansas, and, while there, were induced, probably through a liberal use of free water to sign an additional treaty for the whole tribe, agreeing to move at once. On their return the tribe repudiated their action and refused to be bound by the second treaty.

And so on, through the years that followed the white man invariably broke his word and the Indian was the sufferer. Treaty after treaty was made and ingenious means found for not carrying out the terms involved, until the last battle of the Seminole war, when on August 14th, 1842, a final talk was held and peace terms agreed to. It was agreed that the Indians were to be allowed to remain in Florida on condition that they would cease all hostilities and agree never to renew them, and to return to the southern part of the peninsula. Claim Ownership of Lands Under This Treaty.

It is upon this treaty that the Florida Indians base their claim to Florida lands. That they have kept their terms is undisputed. There is no record of an Indian having fired on a white man from that day to this, but a few years ago a young boy sought to scare a party of surveyors by shooting in their direction. He was promptly tried by a tribal court and one of his ears cut off to mark him as one who laid himself open to reproach by pretending to violate the Indian treaty with the whites.

So far as the Indians were con-

cerned the terms of the treaty were too good to last, and soon the authorities among the white men were contending that it was fully contrary to any agreement, and the Indians were corralled a tribe at a time and taken west. In each instance a larger number never reached their new home, death resulting from confinement, change of food and homelike conditions. One party numbering 370 when they left Florida lost fifty on the way.

At the close of 1834, 1,420 Indians had been sent from Florida and, according to the Indians, only ninety-four remained, two of whom are still living.

Indians Had a Few Faithful White Friends.

During the years that followed, the whites, as a class were enemies and oppressors of the Indians, but there were always a few faithful white persons whose interests were on the side of right and justice, who kept up agitation which finally resulted in Senator Talliferro introducing in the 1011 session of congress a bill appropriating \$10,000 for negotiating with these Indians and determining what could be done to relieve their condition.

Certain persons were sent by the Indian office, but, owing to the Indian's distrust of government officials, nothing was accomplished. Senator Talliferro passed out of the senate, but the Indians found a warm friend in Senator Fletcher, who then became senior senator from Florida. He kept up the agitation and also prevented the appropriation from lapsing.

Spencer Appointed Special Commissioner.

On March 1st, 1913, Lucien A. Spencer was appointed special commissioner to the Florida Indians in the hope that his previous acquaintance with them would overcome their prejudice. His policy of friendship and interest without coercion or meddling with their affairs, is slowly but surely breaking down this barrier. For the first two years, Mr. Spencer told a Herald reporter, the work seemed absolutely hopeless, and then a great change came over the Indians, and they, especially the Seminoles, were willing to receive aid from the government. The greatest question remaining unanswered is that of securing funds to carry on the work.

The Indians are now anxious to settle on Indian lands where the whites can not molest them. The bill law against education is breaking down, and particular attention is being given by Mr. Spencer to the conditions. A white doctor is furnished to all sick Indians, all hospital and dental bills are paid by the government, and all children who agree to attend school will be clothed. This is as far as the limited finances will permit. Mr. Spencer has a fund of ten thousand dollars has been included in the next appropriation bill, which, if it passes without the opening up of reservation lands, do necessary ditching and fencing, and start the Indians in farming operations, as well as build and equip a small schoolhouse for the exclusive use of the Indians.

Help Indians by Teaching Them to Help Themselves. "It is not the purpose of the government to make a ration treaty with the Indians as in the 1915 session, when questioned yesterday regarding to the condition of the Indians because of the action of Mr. Spencer, when he said, "It is a general opinion," he added, "that the government is in duty bound to feed all Indian in the United States, but this is not true."

Mr. Spencer explained that in the past the government had made many ration treaties with the Seminoles, variably bad. "When any person, no matter what his color, knows that there is no incentive to industry, but, rather, a reward for idleness and worthless individuals," he said.

The government, Mr. Spencer said, has purchased and set aside about two thousand acres of land in the Everglades, some in the neighborhood of Cow Creek tribe, some near the mouth of the river, and some near the home of the Miccosesees.

Salary and traveling expenses of the special commissioner are paid from general funds and in that way the Seminole appropriation is all saved for the Seminoles. In the next appropriation it is proposed to make the Seminole self-supporting, so that he will be placed in a position to maintain his independence that means a place in the civil life of the country as an industrious, honest, truthful citizen.

Asked the differences between the Seminoles and the Miccosesees, Mr. Spencer said he never met any Seminoles, with the exception of fifteen who had an admixture of negro blood, but that the Miccosesees came to Florida about two hundred and fifty years before the Seminoles. The latter he said had reduced to a language to writing, and are considerably ahead of their kinsmen in every respect except natural intelligence.

Language One of the Most Difficult in World.

When the reporter asked Mr. Spencer if he had succeeded in mastering the languages, the latter laughed and, pointing to his bookcase, took out a dictionary of the Seminole language. He opened it to the letter "E."

"See this word," Mr. Spencer said, pointing to the word, *estepicocochaco* is bare feet, *estepicocochaco* is bare feet, *estepicocochaco* is bare feet, and *Hesuk* means a good talker, and *Hesuk* means a good talker.

"Do you wonder," the commissioner asked, "that no one has mastered the language?"

State Should Have Entire Responsibility for Indians.

The entire responsibility for the Florida Indian should by rights, rest with the state rather than with the nation. Mr. Spencer believes these Indians were originally recognized as Spanish subjects, and when Spain ceded Florida to the United States, they came as part of the new

territorial possession.

"In 1820, when the United States government transferred all the swamp and overflowed lands to the state, it certainly did not abrogate the Indians' treaty rights to lands in the lower part of the peninsula," Mr. Spencer insisted. "The rights of white land holders in the tract are undoubtedly respected and why should not the Indian receive the same consideration?" he asked.

Friends of the Seminoles made an effort in the 1912 session of the legislature, to reserve about two hundred thousand acres of overflowed lands for the Indians, but in the 1915 session a similar bill was introduced, asking for a small tract. Neither bill became a law, but both undoubtedly served a purpose in creating interest in the Indians' cause, and perhaps in time they may get a small measure of justice. "The state has taken every thing these Indians had," Mr. Spencer declared, "and the state should certainly make provision for them."

The reporter asked what Florida could do for the Indians without interfering with the work of the United States government.

State Should Provide a Large Game Preserve.

"The state should take into consideration the fact that in our work of civilizing the Indian, it is impossible to do so in the matter of government, mode of living and traditions of the past three hundred years," the commissioner explained. "The work must grow gradually. While an addition to the present game preserve, including, deer, quail, and the like, yet, for many years to come, hunting must play an important part in awakening a subsistence. Meat is the chief article of diet and it will take time to produce sufficient cattle and hogs to supply the demand."

The state has thousands of acres of land that is absolutely worthless for any purpose except as a game preserve, Mr. Spencer believes. The Indian foresees the coming scarcity of game and at present the best game keeper in the state. There may have been a time when he slaughtered deer for their skins but he does not do so now.

A tract of land at least three townships square should be set aside for the Seminoles, Mr. Spencer thinks. It is not a question, he says, of whether the land is valuable, but of whether the people of the state desire to pay the Indian a small portion of the

debt they owe him. Education Highly Important For Indians' Development.

Indian children should be recognized and admitted to any and all white schools, is another belief of Mr. Spencer. "Until very recently," he said, "there has been a tribal ban on education. In arguing for schools he always met the statement that as soon as the Indian learned to read and write he would learn to lie. The Indian looks on lying as one of the worst sins, hence the ban."

About two years ago Mr. Spencer succeeded in placing a boy in the public school at Ft. Lauderdale, with tribal consent. In two yearly sessions he completed the work of two grades each year, and the principal now assures Mr. Spencer that he has been promoted again. There was some opposition to his being admitted to the white school and it was suggested that he be placed in the colored school instead.

"I opposed this," Mr. Spencer declared, "because I know the Indians are the color of the state in which we whites do. Persons of negro blood among the Indians have no tribal rights whatever and to try and place a Seminole on a plane with negroes would destroy the work completely."

Seminole Should be Saved From the Curse of Whiskey.

The hearty co-operation of the good people of the state is needed in the suppression of the liquor traffic to the Indians. Mr. Spencer quoted the Hon. Cato Sells, commissioner of Indian affairs: "I believe the greatest present menace to the American Indian is whiskey."

"We need the co-operation of the good people of the state in awakening sympathy for this interesting people," the commissioner asserted. "The Florida Indians have moved to such inaccessible places that even our own people do not know him. Our congressmen would have never been able to come in touch with them."

Applications Will be Made For Establishment Schools.

"What are your plans for industrial training? Will you have a good land would be required?" was asked.

"Whenever a sufficient number of Indians have settled on reservation lands, application will be made for the establishment of a government school," was the reply. "I expect the first enrollment will contain a larger number of adults than children,

because the old Indian is not too proud to study in the same class with his grandchild.

For the past three hundred years the Indian has been growing crops in Florida and yet knows nothing of agriculture. He searches out a good spot of land, plants three crops, and then, having exhausted the soil, moves to a new location, when if he had any idea of scientific farming, he could remain on the same site and secure a larger yield with a fraction of the labor.

The course will be planned with a vocational aim clearly and definitely dominant. The commissioner will aim to produce a scientist nor a specialist, but a practical, efficient farmer whose success will depend on his skill in doing. The course will include the work of the ordinary diversified farm. Mechanical arts, home economics in all the branches and other practical lines will follow.

"The question of how much good land is needed, is one that I cannot answer," said Mr. Spencer. "It all depends on what he is intended for, but there is one thing certain, no matter how much or how little, it must be in the southern part of the peninsula where the Indian agreed to remain, as no inducement would tempt him from his agreement with the whites many years ago."

It is believed the European war will in the end be the greatest help to the Florida Indian in working out his problem, as it will teach him that the hunting on which he has depended for many generations must come to an end, and he must turn his hand to other pursuits, or perish. With the assistance of Mr. Spencer he is already doing this. He is working in the fields for the white farmers whose tracts border the Everglades. Of course the older Indians have not yet unlearned to this extent, but some of the younger men are picking berries for their white neighbors.